



Centre international d'éducation aux droits humains
International Centre for Human Rights Education

Young Women Young Leaders

An Action Guide for Participation

This project has been funded by Status of Women Canada and the Telus Montreal Community Board

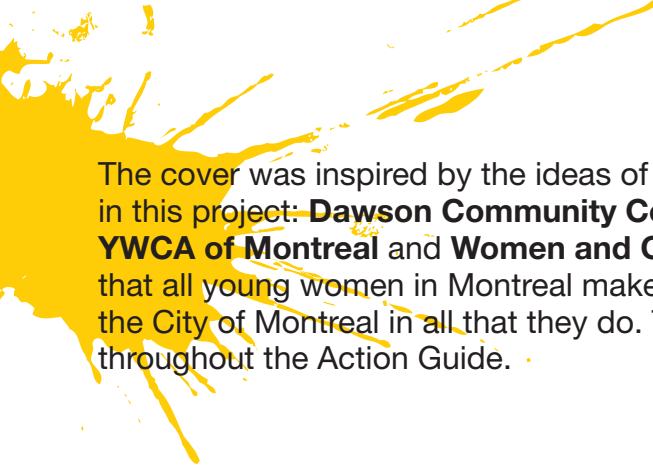


Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada



Montreal
community board™



The cover was inspired by the ideas of young women leaders from organizations partnering in this project: **Dawson Community Center, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi Côte-des-Neiges, YWCA of Montreal** and **Women and Cities International**. These young women leaders hope that all young women in Montreal make their mark, and create a splash of colour throughout the City of Montreal in all that they do. Their powerful silhouettes are featured on the cover and throughout the Action Guide.

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ISBN 978-2-923696-75-1
Legal deposit: 4th trimester 2013
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
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What is Young Women, Young Leaders?

Young Women, Young Leaders (YWYL) is an Equitas program that aims to strengthen the participation of young women in civic, political and community life in Montreal. It aims towards the meaningful inclusion and effective contribution of young women in decision-making processes that impact on their own lives as well as life in their community. To do this, YWYL supports Action for Change projects led by young women that address issues that most affect them in their daily lives. These are carried out in collaboration with a strong network of community organizations, mentors, municipal leaders and institutional partners.

The **YWYL** program has three phases:

- 1) Community organizations use this **Action Guide for Participation** to deliver capacity-building workshops and plan a project with groups of young women
- 2) Young women design and lead an **Action for Change** aimed at tackling barriers to participation in their community
- 3) During a city-wide **Young Women's Forum**, all of the participating young women's groups come together to present their Action for Change and share their ideas for increasing participation with stakeholders, local decision-makers and the larger community

What is an Action for Change?

An Action for Change in the context of the YWYL program involves a group of young women leading an initiative that specifically aims at strengthening their participation in their community. This includes deciding on the issue they want to address, planning and carrying out the necessary steps and deciding how to measure success. An Action for Change should include community awareness raising activities and outreach to local decision-makers to address barriers to participation affecting young women. The process will extend over a period of **six to eight months**.

An example of Action for Change might be a group of young women doing a poster campaign about the barriers to participation young women face in their community and presenting their ideas about solutions to city council.

What is the Action Guide for Participation?

The Action Guide for Participation (Action Guide) is a practical tool to support young women throughout the YWYL program, promoting their participation in civic, political, and community life.

The Action Guide is designed to:

- **Build knowledge** about young women's participation
- **Equip** young women and community organizations with **skills** to increase their participation
- **Support** young women in leading actions to address barriers to their participation and issues that affect them
- Ensure more opportunities for **equal and effective participation** of young women in youth organizations and youth-led actions

The Action Guide:

- Serves as a road map for those supporting the YWYL program
- Is a resource to help create the learning climate necessary for young women's engagement
- Guides the 5-step process leading to the realization of a collective Action for Change
- Prepares the groundwork for the Young Women's Forum, where young women will share ideas, experiences and recommendations with stakeholders, local leaders and decision makers

Who is the Action Guide for?

This Action Guide is aimed at:

- Young women (15 to 25) who will participate in workshops focused on building knowledge and skills with the goal of fostering more active participation. These young women may eventually use the Action Guide to support their peers in similar activities.
- Facilitators working with a group of young women to build their knowledge and skills and support them in their actions.

How to use the Action Guide?

The Action Guide has **four sections** and includes workshops, activities and resources to lay the foundation for young women to participate effectively and bring about change in their community. Below are suggestions on how to use the different sections in the guide.

I – Setting the stage for young women's participation focuses on building the knowledge, skills and attitudes of group facilitators. Use this section to learn more about the issues that young women face, the barriers to their participation, as well as how to create respectful, inclusive and participatory spaces, and how to effectively support your group through the YWYL program.

II – Enabling young women's participation: The Action for Change focuses on young women's engagement for social change. Use the five-step process provided to develop the Action for Change with your group of young women. They will identify their needs and the barriers to their participation and build their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to bring about change in their community through their Action for Change.

III – Dinamicas and activities contains the tools you will need in section II above.

IV – Getting informed includes a variety of reference materials to increase knowledge, clarify concepts and make links to community resources. Use it to increase your own knowledge as well as to complement activities and dinamicas you do with your group.

Finally, meet regularly with the group of young women and other stakeholders to discuss the project. Consider how to make the most of the program and share your successes and challenges.



Setting the stage for young women's participation

Facilitators should use this section to prepare themselves for working with a group of young women on an Action for Change

I – Setting the stage for young women’s participation

This section will help you:

- Reflect on why your group is involved in YWYL
- Identify issues and barriers to young women’s participation that are relevant for your group
- Reflect on what young women need to participate meaningfully and how to support them in the process
- Develop a draft plan for how to lead your group through the YWYL program and the Action for Change process

To do this, review the rest of this section to:

- Figure out the “**why**” of your involvement – Why is young women’s participation important? Why should your group be involved?
- Reflect on the “**how**” of your involvement – What do young women need to participate meaningfully? What is your role in supporting them? How can you plan ahead and help make it happen?

Figuring out the “why”

Before you begin, it’s important to understand why you would get your group of young women involved in a program like this one and figure out how to do it in a way that is most relevant for them. Keep reading to learn more.

Why young women’s participation, why YWYL?

Every young woman has the potential to be a leader in her community and to actively contribute to civic, political and community life. Yet young women are often excluded or left behind and consequently their potential goes unnoticed.

Many girls start off interested in civic and political life at a young age, but their interest slips when they become teenagers. As children they are told by family and friends they can be and do anything they want, but as they grow up, they encounter gender stereotypes, discrimination, pressure to conform to traditional roles and other realities that act as barriers to their participation.¹

Also, formal institutions (e.g., school system) and service providers (e.g., health services) sometimes overlook the specific education and support that young women need to overcome these barriers. That’s why programs and inclusive spaces in the informal sector, where young women can actively engage and have opportunities to bring about change, are so important.² But even here, there are gaps. Needs assessments carried out by Equitas in 2009 and 2013 revealed an under-representation of young women in youth programs offered by community organizations in Montreal.

To address this gap, YWYL helps create a space in the community where young women feel they can belong, where they can work together to identify their strengths, plan how they can influence change and carry out effective actions for change. By participating in YWYL, young women contribute to changes in ideas, attitudes and community practices to address barriers that have traditionally prevented them from having a voice in the decisions that

impact on their lives. By engaging in activities specifically designed for them, young women build their knowledge and skills, while strengthening their self-perception and self-esteem. The YWYL program also advances equality and reinforces young women's leadership by connecting them with female role models, providing mentorship and creating opportunities to have their ideas heard by decision makers and community leaders. This in turn leads to more respectful and equitable communities where everyone has a voice and the opportunity to participate.

Why should your group get involved?

Take some time to consider how the goals of YWYL might be in line with the goals of your work with young women and determine the reasons why your organization and group of young women should get involved and work towards these goals.

YWYL goals are to ...	My organization and our young women should be involved because...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build knowledge about young women's participation • Equip young women and community organizations with skills to increase their participation • Support young women in leading actions to address barriers to their participation and issues that affect them • Ensure more opportunities for equal and effective participation of young women in youth organizations and youth-led actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •

- There are 4 times more men than women elected at all levels of government
- Voter turnout for young women is 15 – 30% lower than the average population for elections at all levels of government
- Despite higher education levels, women's average annual salary in Quebec was only 73% of men's average salary in 2008 (See **Fact Sheets** for more information)
- The overwhelming majority (86%) of Canadians believe that there should be equal representation of women and men in leadership roles (Girls Action Foundation, 2013)



What barriers do the young women in your group face?

Reflecting on the needs, interests and concerns of your group is an important part of figuring out how to best support them as you go through the YWYL program. With this in mind, consider the main barriers to women's participation, outlined below. Take a moment to think about which of these might reflect the reality of the young women you work with. Mark the barriers that apply and think of specific examples, if possible.

Setting the stage



It is important to keep in mind that discussion of these barriers may bring up different issues for the young women in your group. This may include disclosing sensitive personal experiences. It is a good idea to have on hand references to community resources for physical and mental health and crisis intervention in your community (i.e., *Centre de santé et services sociaux* – CSSS). Please see the community resource list for more issue-specific resources.

Some barriers to participation that the young women in my group face...

Individual barriers

- ☐ Personal attitude and ability (e.g., low self esteem, motivation) – such as...
- ☐ Lack of knowledge, skills or access to information on how to participate – such as...
- ☐ Competing priorities (e.g., balancing time, cost or energy) – such as...
- ☐ Cultural or family constraints – such as...

Societal barriers

- ☐ Limited access and opportunities (e.g., for leadership, participation, decision-making, to support systems) – such as ...
- ☐ Stereotyping and discrimination – such as ...
- ☐ Lack of female role models – such as ...
- ☐ Others

Keep this list in mind once you've completed it, as it will help guide the work of your group throughout the Action for Change process.

Reflecting on the “how”

What do young women need to participate?

To participate effectively and become agents of change in their community, young women need to access spaces and processes that are young women-friendly, that take into account their interests and motivation, that build their knowledge and skills, and that include opportunities for creating real change.

A part of supporting the young women you work with involves reflecting on your group (e.g., their needs, their interests, as well as opportunities and activities available to them) and ensuring that you create a space for them that is:

- **Safe and welcoming** – the physical and emotional environment is respectful of young women’s identities, values and abilities. Young women feel respected, included and free to express themselves. Activities happen during hours when they can participate and in places where they feel safe.
- **Culturally relevant** – connects with the cultural roots and traditions of the young women involved. There is no one experience of being a young woman: every individual comes to the group with her own experience, influenced by her socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, dis/ability and other personal characteristics.
- **Participatory** – involves young women in decision making and enables them to have an active role in giving input into the activities and the direction of the group.
- **Empowering** – young women can express themselves and take action through activities that build their knowledge, skills and strengths.
- **Action-oriented** – includes meaningful ways for young women to make a difference by providing opportunities for leadership and participation in the community, connecting with role models and mentors who provide insight, guidance and support, and ensuring access to relevant informational, emotional and practical support.

Research shows that in order to be successful:

“1. Young women need to be valued – at home, in school and in the community, as well as in the development of policies and programs

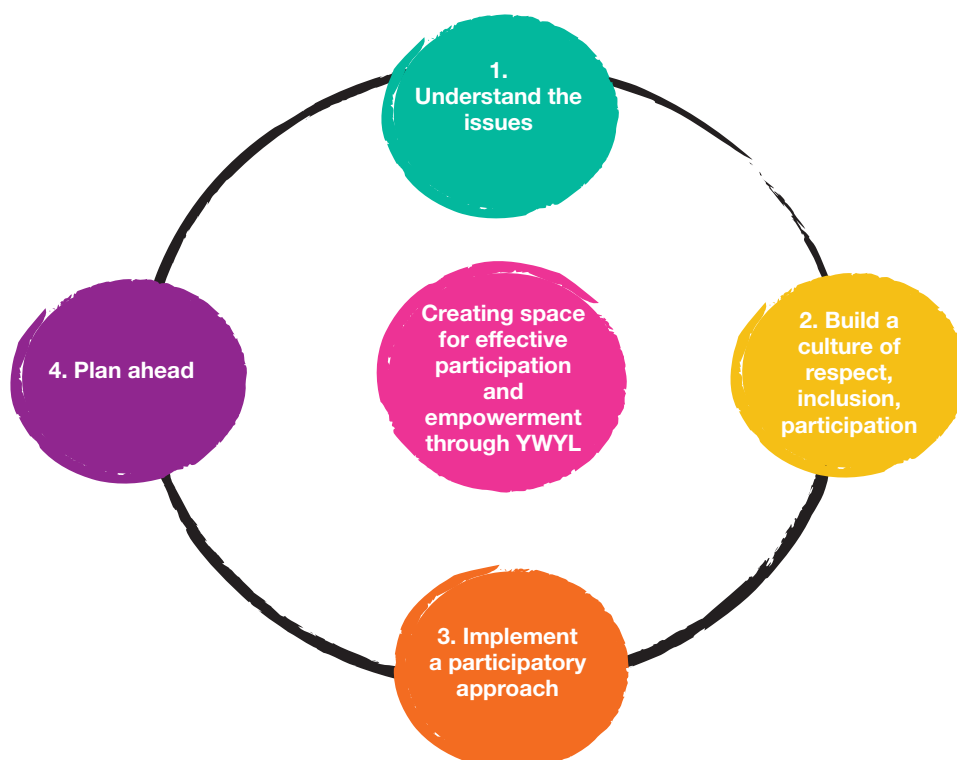
2. Young women need to be given opportunities to learn and lead.”

Source: Girls Action Foundation et al., 2013



What is your role in supporting young women?

Your role is essential. Throughout the YWYL program, you are one of the main supports to your group. In partnership with Equitas, you play a central role in creating the kind of space described above to effectively promote young women’s participation and empowerment and to build their skills to become agents of change in their community. To do this, there are four areas where you will need to invest time in laying the foundation for success:



1. Understand the issues and increase your own knowledge of young women's participation

As a facilitator, you bring your own particular skills and knowledge to the group. While part of your role is to support young women's learning from each other (e.g., by asking open-ended questions that encourage reflection), it is also important to provide content expertise and guidance (e.g., cite real-world examples to illustrate a point). To effectively lead the process, there are six key content areas where it is important for the facilitator to have a basic understanding. In preparation, a starting point is to determine in which of these areas you already have adequate knowledge and in which you may need to increase your knowledge to best support group learning.

Use the scale (**1** – not very strong, **2** – could use a refresher, **3** – pretty strong) to rate your familiarity with each knowledge area listed below.

Area of knowledge	Your rating 1 – not very strong 2 – could use a refresher 3 – pretty strong	Where to learn more...
1. The profile of young women in Montreal, Quebec and Canada		Check out: Fact sheet 1
2. Women and politics		Check out: Fact sheet 2
3. Gender equality		Check out: Fact sheet 3
4. Young women's participation – barriers and Actions for Change		Check out: Fact sheet 4
5. Women's rights		Check out: Fact sheet 5
6. Taking action for young women's participation		Check out: Fact sheet 6

For those areas where you feel you need to increase your level of understanding, use the **Fact sheets** provided at the back of this guide as a starting point. You can also look into the various organizations and service providers listed in the **Community resource list** for additional information and resources. And Equitas can also help by providing additional resources, skills-building and support.

Building a culture of respect, inclusion and participation involves recognizing and respecting young women's needs and experiences, and fostering group dynamics where they feel free and safe to take risks.

Facilitation is important in creating this climate. To ‘facilitate’ means to make easy. A good facilitator is someone who helps mentor learning, rather than imposing it on a group. Facilitators are coaches, listeners, trainers, learners, and managers of the group process. They are people whom young women can trust and who encourage them to have fun and to grow at their own pace.

The **“Feel-Think-Act”** approach is an easy guide to ensure your debriefs and discussions are led according to a participatory approach.

“Feel” questions get at the participants’ **experience** of an activity;

“Think” questions allow **critical reflection** and analysis;

“Act” questions focus on strategies and potential **actions.**

The “Feel-Think-Act” approach is particularly useful when quickly debriefing a dinamica, or when reflection questions are not provided after an activity.

See **Section III**
for more on this
approach.



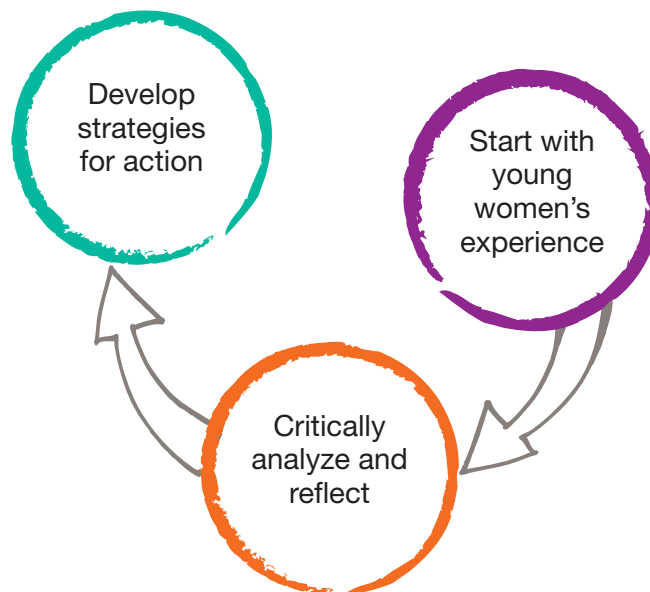
Take a moment to reflect on whether you as a facilitator...

- ☐ Listen carefully and ensure open lines of communication with the group
- ☐ Balance the needs of individual participants with those of the group
- ☐ Manage conflict and generate solutions in a transparent and participatory way
- ☐ Are aware of the influence you have on the group
- ☐ Encourage dialogue rather than debate
- ☐ Challenge participants in a respectful way
- ☐ Understand your own identity as a facilitator and how your experiences might be affecting the group
- ☐ Are inclusive of diverse opinions, even when you may not agree with them
- ☐ Model behaviour that you wish to foster in your group
- ☐ Use the varying strengths and abilities of individuals in the group
- ☐ Share your knowledge openly and respectfully, while recognizing that of the group
- ☐ Allow for shared decision making with the group
- ☐ Encourage feedback on your style and approach, and provide it to others

3. Use a participatory approach

Key to creating inclusive and participatory spaces is the use of a participatory approach throughout the process. This approach promotes young women's empowerment by ensuring their voices, needs, and interests are at the centre of the process. A participatory approach:

1. **Starts with the experience** of young women through activities that build on their life experiences
2. **Encourages critical reflection and analysis** of the issues important to young women by enabling them to question their assumptions, share ideas, look for patterns in their experience and learn from their peers
3. **Develops strategies for actions** that lead to social change by including opportunities to practise and apply what has been learned



Below are strategies you can use to integrate a participatory approach into the learning process with your group.

Try to...

Start with the experience of young women...

- ☐ Create learning conditions that promote a sense of safety, openness and trust
- ☐ Use activities that encourage participants to share their experiences with the rest of the group
- ☐ Integrate opportunities that promote autonomy, participation and collaboration

Encourage critical reflection and analysis...

- ☐ Lead discussions that build knowledge, promote critical thinking and allow young women to come up with their own answers (see The “Feel-Think-Act” approach)
- ☐ Use a variety of tools such as dinamicas, activities, and debriefs (see Section III – Dinamicas and activities for more information)
- ☐ Encourage feedback from the group

Develop strategies for actions...

- ☐ Ensure activities lead the group to discuss and strategize about action and build their capacity to do so
- ☐ Share power and influence in the group to empower participants to define priorities, make decisions and strengthen leadership skills in action planning

4. Plan ahead and make it happen

Developing a concrete plan will help ensure that the YWYL program runs smoothly and effectively with your group. A plan includes a tentative schedule, a list of resources most likely needed, as well as a reflection on some of the possible obstacles the group may face and ways to overcome them.

To begin, review **Section II – Enabling young women’s participation: The Action for Change**. This section presents the **five-step process** you will do with your group. Each step outlines objectives and includes workshops that build on each other to explore young women’s motivation to participate, develop their knowledge and understanding about the barriers to their participation, and support a process for developing and carrying out an action in their community.

Once you have read Section II, make a plan using the chart below, including the time and resources you’ll need to complete each step:

Steps	Workshop dates	Resources needed (e.g., materials, food, guest speakers)
1. Explore motivation	Workshop 1: Workshop 2:	
2. Learn about young women's participation	Workshop 3: Workshop 4:	
3. Identify areas for change	Workshop 5: Workshop 5b (optional): Workshop 6:	
4. Plan an action and do it!	Workshop 7: Workshop 8: Workshop 8b (ongoing):	
5. Evaluate, celebrate and share ideas	Workshop 9: Workshop 10:	

Next, it's important to assess the risks your group might face along the way and think of strategies to address these. Thinking about the risks ahead of time will help you manage your expectations and make adjustments when challenges arise.

Some possible risks or obstacles the group might face are...	Some of the ways to overcome them are...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •

Go for it!

Now that you understand the issues, you know how to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment using a participatory approach, and you have a plan, you're ready to get started!

As you make it happen, remember to document the milestones, the successes and the lessons learned along the way (with photos, videos, blogs, diaries or notes).. You'll have an opportunity to showcase these in dialogue with other groups of young women, local stakeholders and decision makers during the Young Women's Forum.

And have fun!



Enabling young women's participation: Action for Change

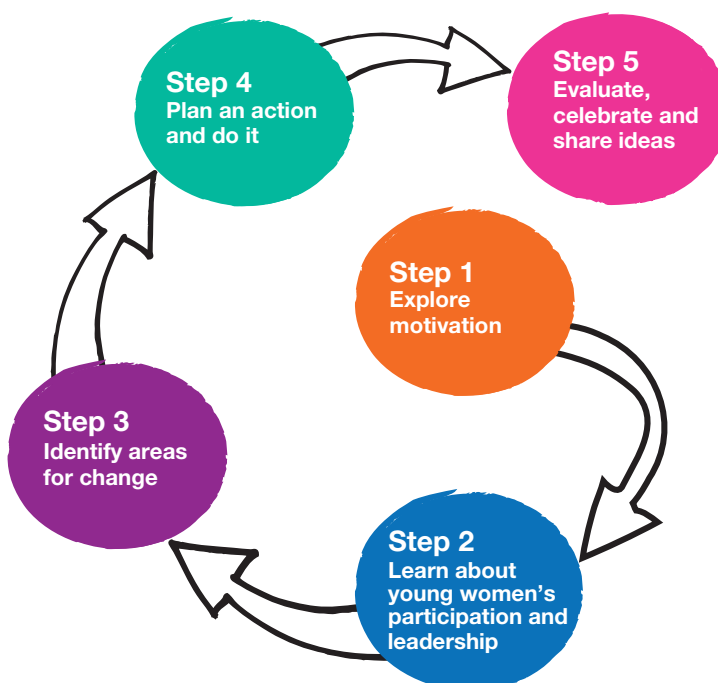
II - Enabling young women's participation: The Action for Change

This section outlines an overview of the process you will use to develop the Action for Change with your group, and a step-by-step description of how to do it.

Remember the Action for Change will be an initiative that specifically aims at strengthening the participation of your group of young women in their community and that the process will extend over a period of **six to eight months**. You can find some ideas for possible actions in **Fact sheet 6- Taking action**.

A diagram of the process and a brief description of each step are provided below.

The Action for Change: A 5-step process



Step 1 Explore motivation

Your group will learn about the Action for Change project on young women's participation that you will do as a group and explore your motivation to participate.

Step 2 Learn about young women's participation

Your group will analyze the power structures within your community and identify where young women have or do not have a voice and why. You will then identify barriers that affect young women's participation and the factors that keep these barriers in place.

Step 3 Identify areas for change

Your group will choose one societal barrier to young women's participation to address, identify specific changes you want to see in your community and define the goal for your Action for Change.

Step 4 Plan an action and do it!

Your group will decide on the specific action you will take to contribute to the desired change in increasing young women's participation in your community. You will then prepare a detailed plan for your Action for Change. Your group will carry out the Action for Change in your community and monitor its progress.

Step 5 Evaluate, celebrate and share ideas

Your group will evaluate the process and the results of your Action for Change. You will reflect on successes and consider how the Action for Change project contributed to changes in young women's participation in the community. You will then plan how to showcase the success of your project and also plan for the Young Women's Forum.